

Changing principals' leadership through feedback and coaching

Peter Goff, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Ellen Goldring, J. Edward Guthrie, & Leonard Bickman, Vanderbilt University

There is substantial evidence that instructional leadership is needed to foster effective teacher practices and student achievement. Instructional or learning-centered leadership (LCL) includes aspects of school leadership that highlight the importance of principals' actions in supporting teachers to improve instruction. Research has also shown that principals need support to develop their capacity in LCL. Providing feedback for principals has been identified as a viable, cost-effective method for principals to develop their capacity in LCL, yet feedback alone may not be sufficient to stimulate changes in leadership behaviors. Coaching with feedback may enhance principals' LCL.

Researchers Leonard Bickman, Ellen Goldring, Peter Goff, and J. Edward Guthrie conducted a randomized experiment of principals in a large urban school district to explore if coaching, when combined with feedback from teachers, changes principals' leadership practices. This brief summarizes the research findings regarding the impact of the feedback and coaching intervention on principals' leadership behaviors.

Providing meaningful feedback through principal assessment, and helping principals to adequately interpret feedback through coaching, are viable tools to improve leadership practice.

FINDINGS

- The study found a positive effect of coaching on principals' leadership development.
- Coaching and feedback together facilitate principals' ability to engage with their faculty regarding their own leadership development.
- Coaches facilitate principals' self-reflection in order to initiate leadership change. Specifically, coaches helped principals clarify and prioritize issues in their schools, interpret feedback from teachers, and provide skills which principals use to enhance their overall leadership.
- The study found no noticeable impact on principals' efforts to support their teachers' individual instructional development. This may be due to principals' tendencies to address teacher feedback in collective settings such as staff meetings, rather than provide targeted feedback to individual teachers.

How and why feedback and coaching improve leadership

LOGISTIC EFFECTS:

Principals can respond to feedback in group settings or by meeting with teachers individually. Because group meetings are more feasible logistically, principals tend to favor this mode of feedback use over a more targeted approach.

FOCUS EFFECTS:

Coaches help principals focus their strategic efforts on specific areas or domains of need, or to particular groups of teachers.

DISSONANCE EFFECTS:

Coaches are instrumental in helping principals overcome their resistance to the feedback from teachers and determine next steps for leadership actions.

IMPLICATIONS

- Providing principals with feedback alone about their leadership may not induce behavior changes in principals' leadership practices.
- A system of professional learning support, such as leadership coaching, can assist principals in making sense of feedback gathered from teachers. Feedback should be integrated into comprehensive support systems featuring clear and consistent district support, common time for principals to discuss their feedback and action plans with other school leaders, and mechanisms to recognize and reward feedback use related to leadership development.
- Principals need support translating feedback data from teachers into actionable behaviors.
- Coaches can help principals overcome their resistance to feedback from teachers.
- Eight to ten coaching sessions (roughly once per month) may be adequate to induce behavior changes in principals. More research is needed to understand how the frequency and intensity of coaching produce leadership growth.

MORE INFO

Contact Peter Trabert Goff, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison: pgoff@wisc.edu. This brief is derived from the journal article [**Changing principals' leadership through feedback and coaching**](#) (2014) by P. Goff, E. Goldring, J. Guthrie, and L. Bickman which appeared in the *Journal of Educational Administration*, 52(5), 682-704.

The opinions expressed in this policy brief are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of CPRE or its institutional partners. The research was supported by grants from the Institute of Education Sciences (R305A070298, R305B040110).

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) brings together education experts from renowned research institutions to contribute new knowledge that informs PreK-20 education policy and practice. Our work is peer-reviewed and open-access. [Visit cpre.org](http://cpre.org) or [**subscribe to Insights**](#), CPRE's monthly e-newsletter.